

# The Nutritionist's Corner

## Eat Right to Power Up your Workout

You may have heard that exercising on an empty stomach can help you to burn more fat. The truth is, eating a pre-exercise meal can help you to power through a workout. Exercising with increased efficiency can actually make you work harder to burn even more calories, which in turn burns more body fat and helps to strengthen your heart and lungs. Fueling up for exercise can have a huge impact on your performance and stamina, keeping your heart pumping for a great workout.

### Reasons to Fuel Up

There are several reasons why it is important to have some kind of pre-exercise nourishment.

1. To help settle your stomach and decrease feelings of hunger
2. To fuel your muscles. Eating far enough in advance (depending on the type of exercise) helps the food you eat to be digested and stored as glycogen, which is used for energy stores.
3. To prevent low blood sugar. Low blood sugar can make you feel light-headed and tired, and can cause you to have blurred vision and indecisiveness. Aside from making you feel uncomfortable and irritable, this can negatively impact performance and prevent you from getting the most out of your workout.

### Finding the Right Meal for You

The particular meal that may be most beneficial to you depends on your own personal preferences. However, there are some guidelines that can help you to figure out what exactly will help you to most efficiently energize your muscles.

Try **high starch, low fat foods** before exercise. These include English muffins, bagels, pasta, crackers and bread (preferable whole grain). These are easier to digest and settle comfortable in your stomach while stabilizing your blood sugar levels. High fat, higher protein foods, like hamburgers and peanut butter, take longer to

leave the stomach and can lead to discomfort and a sluggish performance.

Eating a small amount of **low fat protein** along with higher carbohydrate foods can be beneficial to exercise as well. These can help you to feel satisfied for a longer amount of time without adding too much bulk. Try a few slices of turkey or chicken on wheat bread or a spoonful of low-fat cottage cheese with fruit. Stay away from sugary foods, which can cause a crash in blood sugar that will leave you feeling fatigued.

### Timing Your Meals

Allowing enough time for food to digest is important to get the most out of your pre-exercise meal. Remember, lighter snacks leave the stomach more quickly than higher calorie meals. In general, try to allow

- 3 to 4 hours for a large meal
- 2 to 3 hours for a smaller meal
- 1 to 2 hours for a blended or liquid meal, like a smoothie
- Less than an hour for a small snack (this may vary according to personal tolerance)

Your body will need more time to digest foods if you are going to be participating in more intense exercise. Food can be digested during exercises that can be sustained longer, like running long distances.

If you are competing in a sporting event, always eat foods that you are familiar to you. You may respond negatively to new foods that your stomach is not prepared for, which can impact your performance.

Experiment with different foods to know what works best for you. Remember, food is fuel!

Learn more about healthy eating habits at [www.mypyramid.org](http://www.mypyramid.org)

